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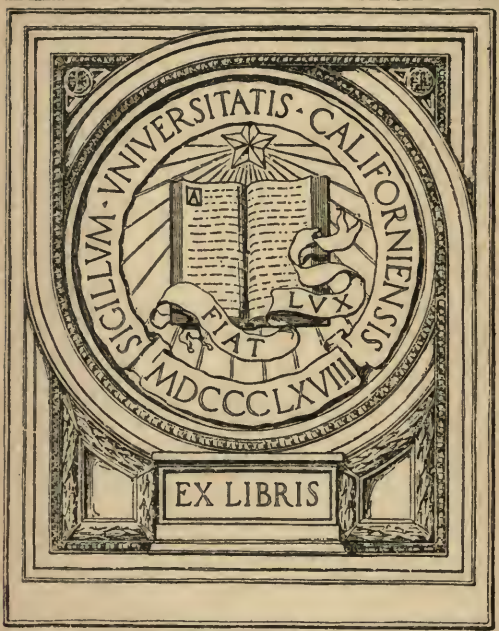

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ETCHINGS

OF

RUSTIC FIGURES,

blue

FOR THE EMBELLISHMENT OF

LANDSCAPE.

BY W. H. PYNE,

AUTHOR OF THE MICROCOSM OF ARTS, ETC., ETC.

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ETCHINGS OF RUSTIC FIGURES,

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In no age and in no country perhaps, have the fine arts met that public patronage which they happily experience in England in the nineteenth century. Every respectable member of the superior classes of society appears emulous to afford his children the advantages of an enlightened education: hence the most distinguished professors in every branch of science have ample employment in communicating their knowledge to the rising generation. The art of painting, among the first in utility, forms a material feature in the plan of education; and the encouragement which its professors have experienced, has called forth their utmost energies in producing works that will facilitate the improvement of their disciples: perceptive books, upon almost every department of the art, have been published. The little work here offered to the public will, it is hoped, contribute something to the general stock of information.

Landscape-painting has long been cultivated with the utmost success by British artists, and works have been produced by them that rival those of the Italian, Flemish, or other distinguished ancient schools.

The rage for making tours, which has so long distinguished the British people, has increased for several years, until it has become the prevailing taste of the higher families to explore the country in search of the picturesque. Numerous portfolios are filled every summer with topographical studies made by amateurs, as well as artists, during these excursions, until those who remain at home can indulge in viewing the romantic and rural scenery of our beautiful island by their fire-side.

The study of appropriate figures for the embellishment of these scenes has not been followed with equal ardour: hence many whose taste is displayed in the representation of landscape, lose their credit by the introduction of groups of figures that are greatly inferior to their well-painted designs. To remedy this defect in some measure, these groups have been formed: their costumes, characters, and general employments have been attended to; which may not alone furnish subjects to compose groups from, but may also lead the student to select figures of a similar class in nature, from which they may make their own original studies.

It has not been the object of the author of this work to represent elegant forms, or to aim at correct drawing; his intention has been, simply to sketch the prominent character and habits of the rustic. Those young students who desire to excel in painting groups of figures in their landscapes with original feeling, may commence by drawing from the etchings here offered, and may derive much improvement by contrasting their dresses by the application of such colours as are usually exhibited in great variety, by persons whose attire is regulated by no rules of taste. Those whose travel will improve their knowledge in these matters, by marking in a common-place book the contrasts which they may find in contemplating the dress of this class of people in the towns and villages where they may chance to stop: this practice will be attended with no trouble. Reference to such memoranda, in the painting-room, readily furnishes the mind with what it otherwise might seek for very long, or perhaps in vain. In London, or other populous towns, where there is a general uniformity of dress, these necessary observations cannot be made.

It has long been the practice of those who make sketches of views from nature, to leave the embellishments of figures, animals, &c. to a future period, fancying that groups for this purpose can be composed at leisure: this practice is erroneous. It is highly essential to sketch figures, animals, or other objects, to embellish the design, upon the

spot: the groups then assume the air of nature; their occupations are mostly accordant to the scene; and they are consequently appropriate in action, character, and every essential that constitutes fitness or propriety.

The eye that is accustomed to look for truth of representation in all the embellishments of a landscape, cannot tolerate what is so commonly met with in pictures of great merit in many other respects; namely, the want of character, not only in figures, but in expletives, that should give value from their form and appropriate uses. A pump or well, a wheel-barrow, a cart, plough, or other object, if not represented with attention to mechanical construction, instead of adding to the interest of the piece, really deteriorates its merit.

The student should make himself acquainted with the true form of these objects, by carefully drawing them in every point of view. This study is amusing as well as useful, great satisfaction resulting from a successful imitation of any object that can be introduced into a picture. Our best painters copied nature in detail, or they could never have produced such identity in every object which they represent. Nothing appears a labour to those who have drawn with accuracy at the commencement of their study. Gainsborough, whose pictures appear to the unskilled in art scarcely intelligible, copied weeds, dock-leaves, and all the minutiæ of fore-grounds with unwearied accuracy: hence a few touches of his magic pencil described the character of such objects.

It would be no less useful to copy groups of animals from the best prints of these subjects, previously to attempting to draw them from nature: for cows, horses, asses, deer, sheep, dogs, and pigs, should be represented with as much truth of character as the human figure; and a landscape, however well painted, wherein these domestic animals appear defective in character, loses half its charm.

Hill's Etchings of Animals drawn from nature form the most celebrated work designed for this purpose. and should be possessed by all who

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feel desirous of acquiring a just knowledge of their picturesque character. The whole work may be too voluminous for every one to possess; but as separate parts can be had, "neat cattle, sheep, horses, deer, asses, mules," &c. it is recommended, that some specimens of them should be procured, as they comprise all that is excellent in the study of domestic animals.

The same mode of acquiring a certain knowledge of colouring animals should be resorted to as described for figures. The student should sketch, however slightly, the masses of black, brown, red, and other colours that variegate the hides of animal; by which means the most beautiful combinations of tints may be procured, and without which practice this necessary art can never be sufficiently understood.

That species of landscape composition which best suits rustic figures of the humble class, similiar to those contained in this work, is most generally cultivated by the artists and amateurs of this country; it has been denominated English pastoral. To explain what is understood by this term, reference may be made to the compositions of Gainsborough, whose landscapes possessed no other characteristics than those which the woods, copses, hamlets, heaths, lanes, and such places, unadorned by art, offered for his imitation. It was in the midst of such scenes in the county of Suffolk that he first studied drawing. His feeling mind led him to select such parts and such objects as nature, or the rudest works of art, combined with nature, afforded in these sequestered spots. The humble inhabitants that peopled these scenes he made the equal objects of his study, and chose from among them such as were most congenial to his poetic fancy: for all that he copied, although it had the appearance of fidelity to its prototype, yet had a certain portion of his original feeling incorporated therein, that accorded with what the poets have termed the pastoral style.

If he sketched a milk-maid, he selected a girl for his model that captivated by her beauty and native sweetness. Cottage children, whom he delighted to paint, were the offspring of health and innocence. His old men were not like those of Ostade, Hemskirk, and other painters of the Dutch and Flemish schools, sordid boors; they were open, artless, grey-headed swains, scarcely bending beneath the burthen of old age.

The groups that are represented in the accompanying plates, are designed to embellish landscapes wherein the figures are secondary objects. Those who desire to study the same class of characters on a larger scale, may select groups or single figures therefrom, and enlarge them by the addition of a little original feeling of their own, which will afford a useful preparatory exercise, fitting them to draw rustic figures from nature.

To improve in such a pursuit, it is recommended to study the works of those artists who have most excelled in forming pictures representing the peasantry of our country. Westall's compositions will afford them the means of acquiring as much elegance of form and tasteful arrangement as such a style can possibly admit of; indeed, some of the pictures of this artist have a superabundance of these qualities, amounting to a fault. But it is the business of him who wishes to improve, to study those works which possess the greatest degree of originality and boldness of design. A great genius will sometimes outstep the boundary of truth; but the energies of such a mind afford examples that genius alone will venture to produce, stimulating the imitator to try his own strength in bold flights of the imagination, which experience will regulate by sober rules.

The works of Cristall in this department will afford the student the means of much improvement; simplicity of character, united with grandeur of style, distinguish his designs. His cottage groups, gleaners, fishermen, and other subjects of the humble class of life, are admirable specimens of the graphic art.

Another eminent artist, Barker, may be instanced, whose works display a great acquaintance with these subjects. Those who admire the compositions of Gainsborough will find much of his taste in the figures and general compositions of this artist. Perhaps among all the living painters, no one has so successfully continued Gainsborough's style of design.

A work of Rustic Figures has lately been published at Bath by this artist; the characters are well drawn, are natural, and engraven in the polyautographic art. They would afford improvement to those who would copy them with attention, as the style is not difficult, and is replete with freedom of line.

The engraved Rustic Figures in imitation of the original drawings in chalk by the late George Moreland, are also excellent specimens of style; they are executed with the utmost freedom of pencilling, and exhibit a just observation of character. A knowledge of breadth may easily be acquired by imitating these original works.

In drawing figures of this class from nature, it is recommended, to commence by making a faint outline of the general form of the object; when that is effected, the proportions must be studied, which should also be made out by tender lines. The masses of shadow should next be lightly rubbed in with a blunt pencil or chalk; this prepares the sketch for finishing. The lines towards the light should be drawn delicately and with determination of form. The shadows on the light side must be kept in so low a tone as not to interrupt the breadth of effect. The bolder pencilling shonld be reserved for the last process, and principally confined to certain shadows of the features, the hair, and the drapery on the shadowed side. By a steady adherence to these rules, when drawing from nature, the character of masterly execution may with certainty be attained.

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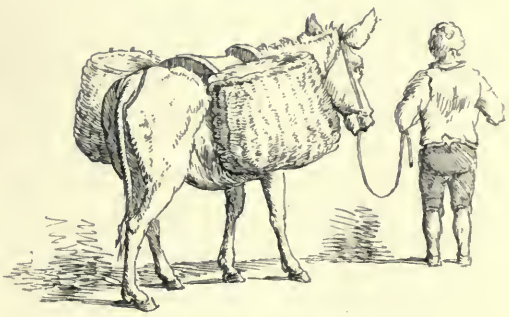

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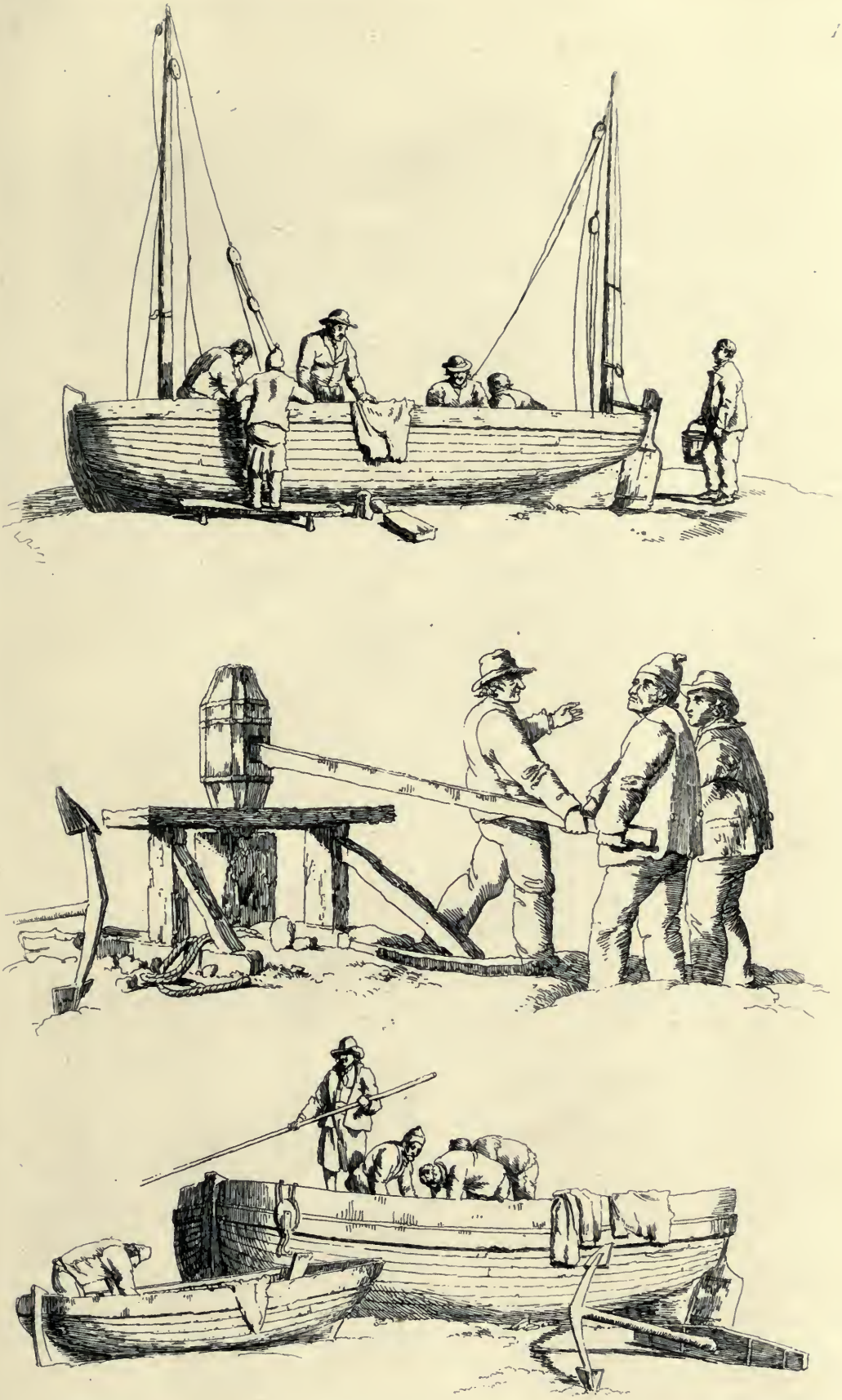

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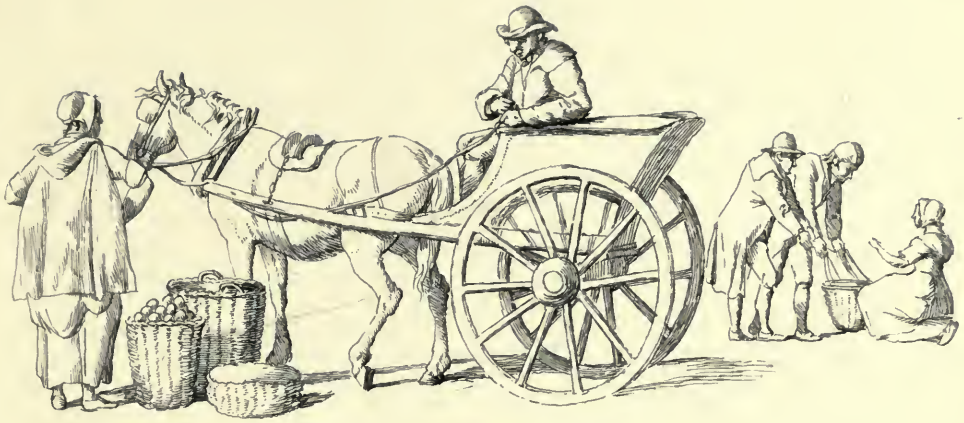

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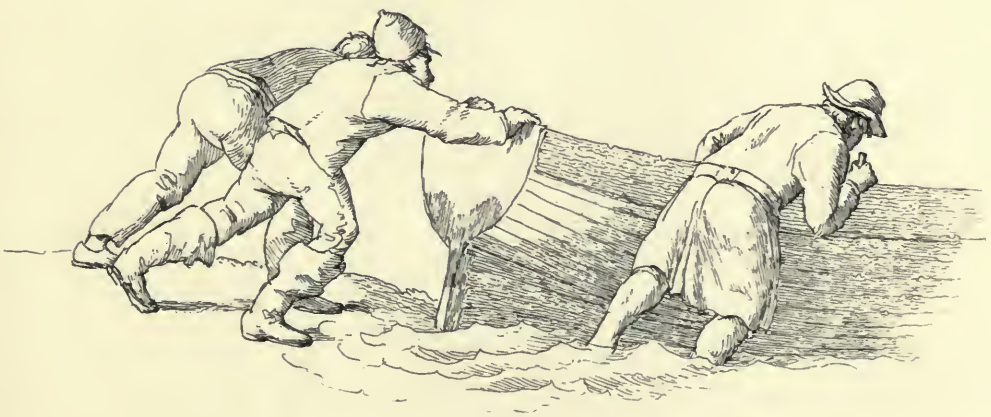

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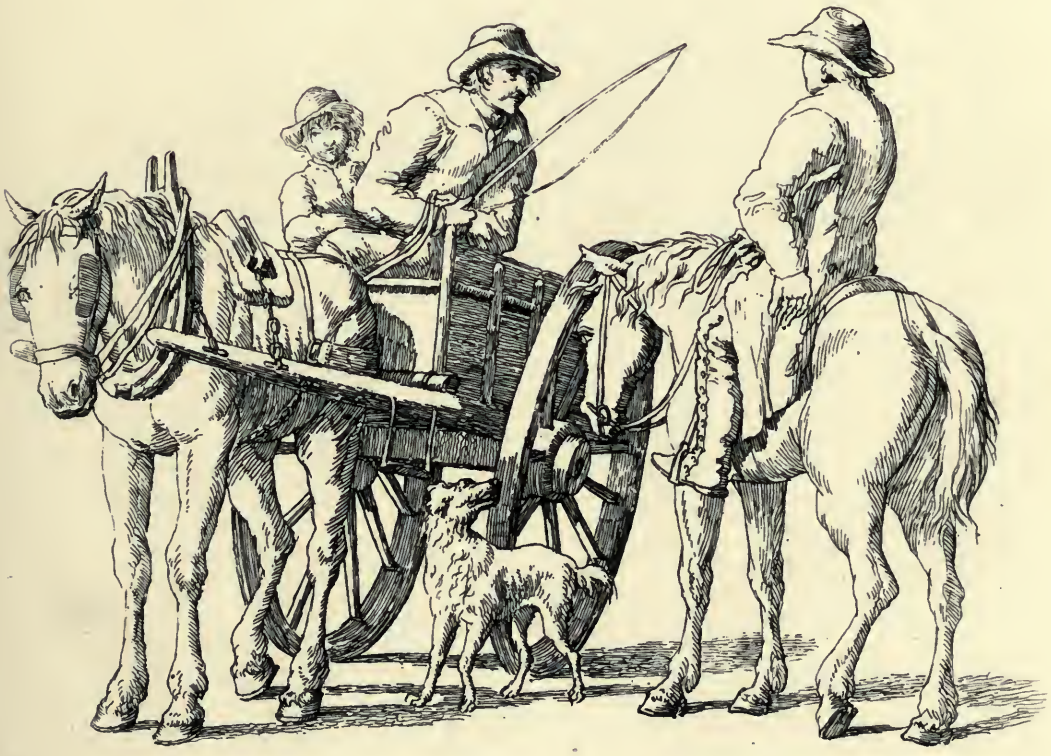

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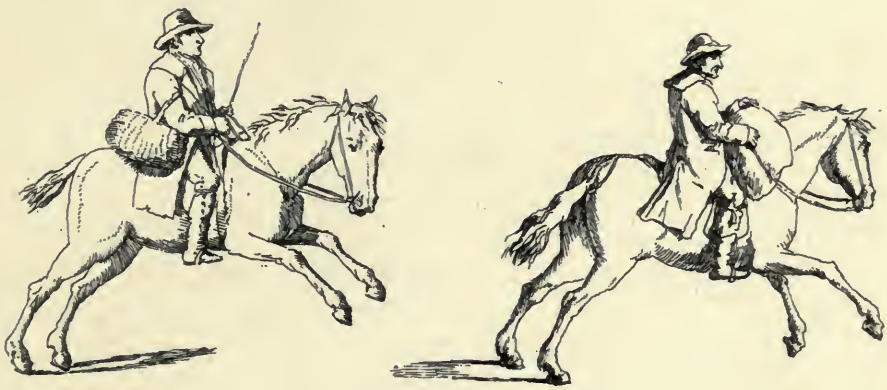

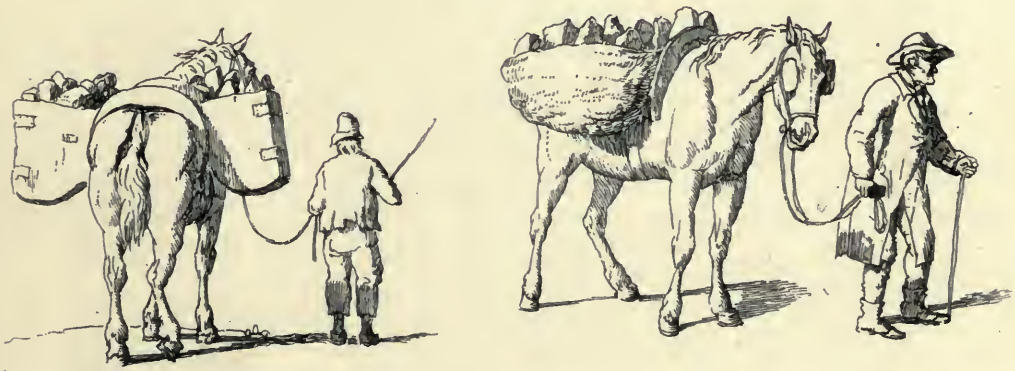

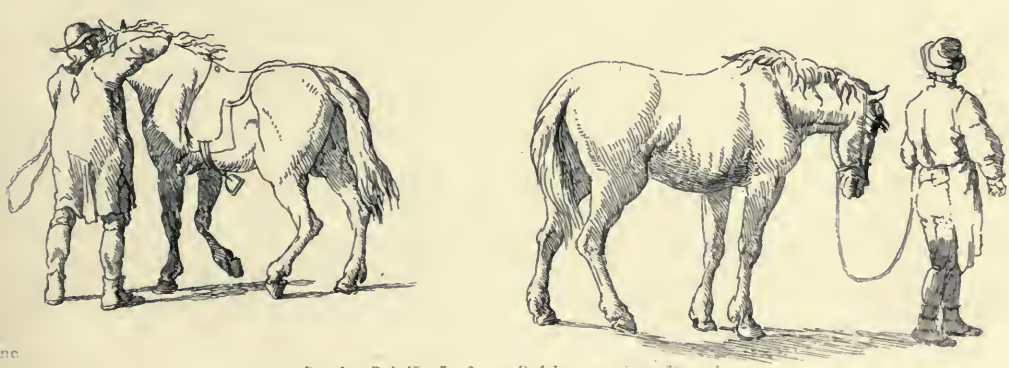

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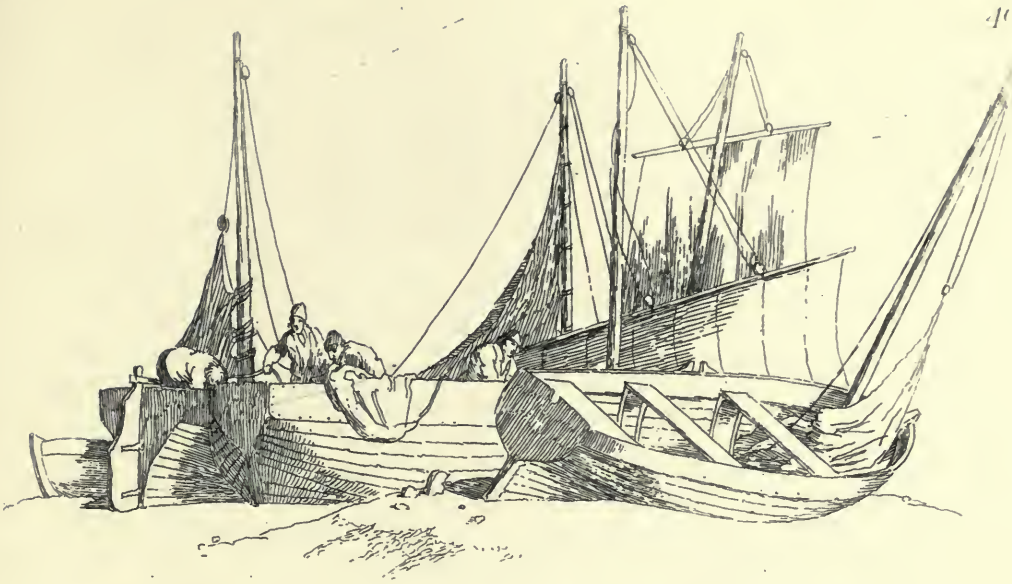

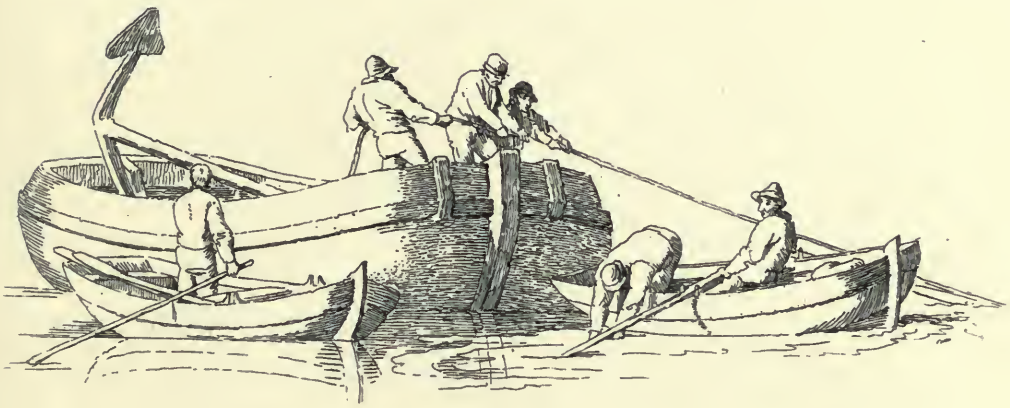

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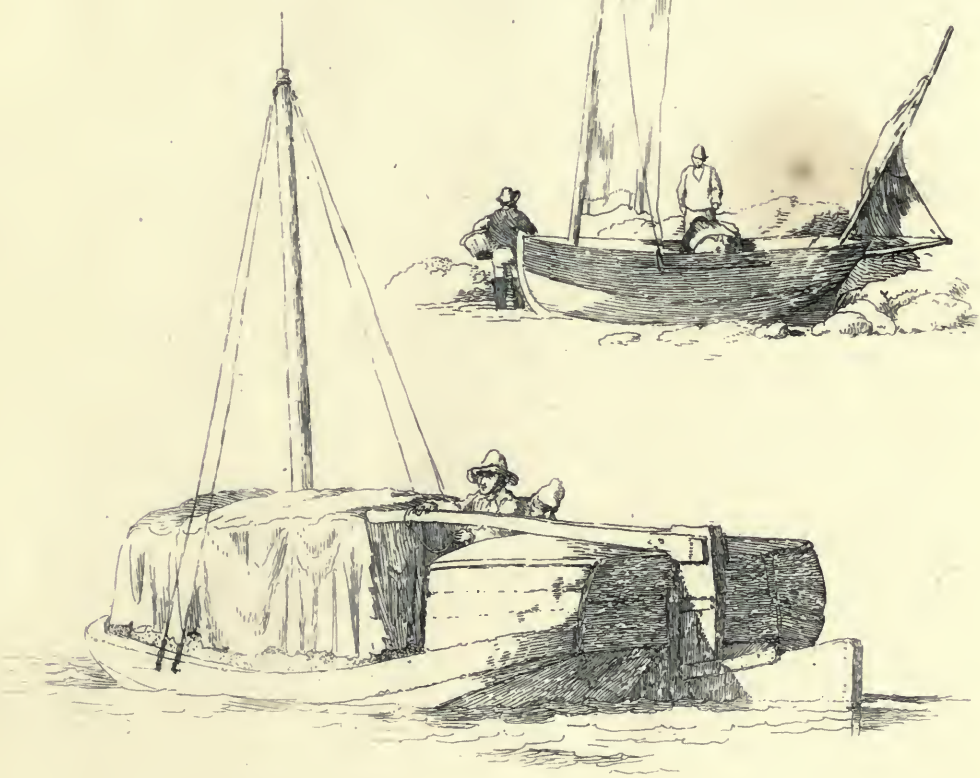

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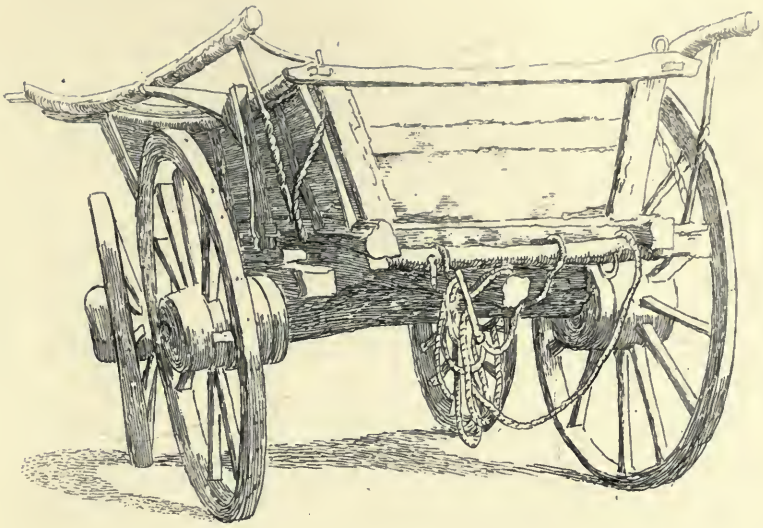

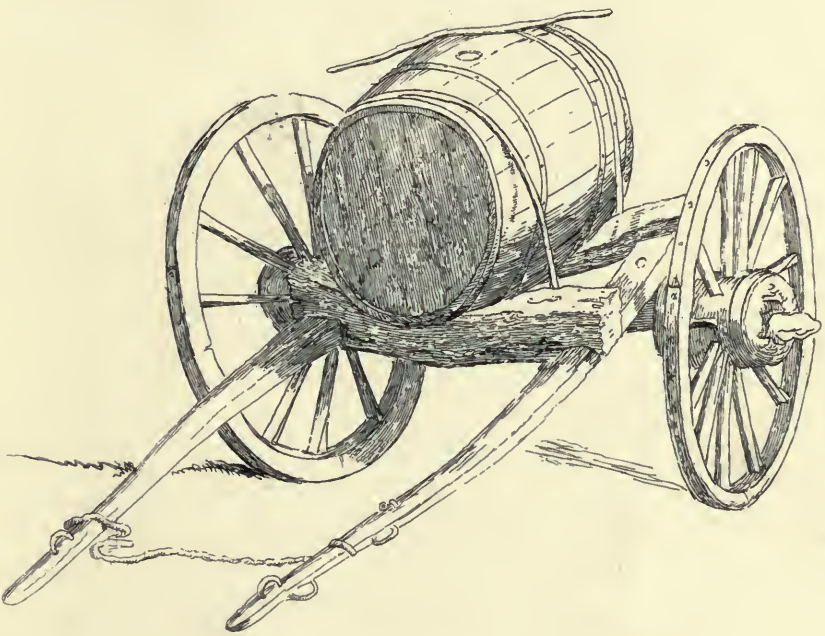

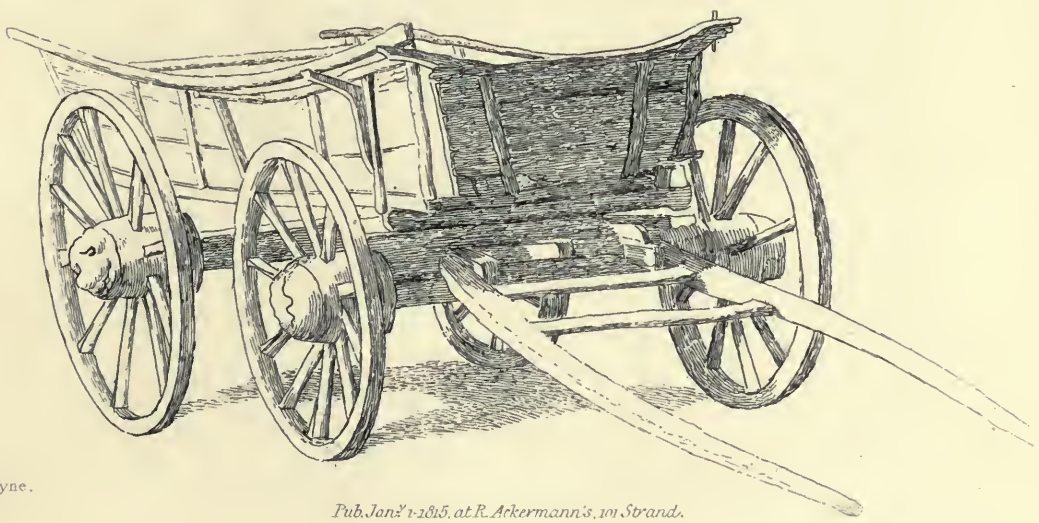

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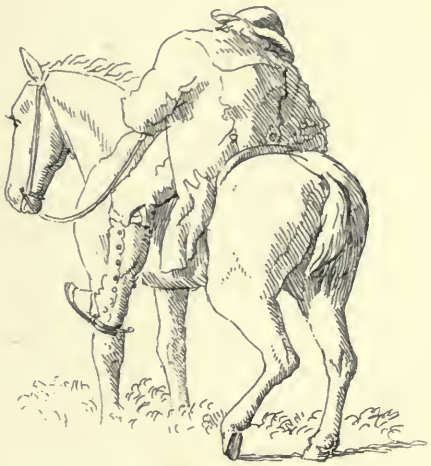

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